

REVIEW OF "SUGAR WITHOUT SLAVES; THE POLITICAL
ECONOMY OF BRITISH GUIANA, 1938 - 1904" by
ALAN H. ADAMSON.

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Sugar and slavery go well together in West Indian History and West Indian Historiography. So much so that one is tempted to ask how did the former actually survive without the latter. This is the question which Dr. A.H. Adamson, choosing a single West Indian Colony, British Guiana, has attempted to answer. The choice of the Colony is an eminently sensible one. For British Guiana was no island. Its 83,000 sq. miles, at least on the face of it, contained after 1838 opportunity enough to devise other ways of living than those patterned on the plantation. Its miniscule population could, surely, have packed their bags - or at least their cutlasses - and move into the empty hinterlands, there to create a way of life sweetened without sugar and profitable without planters.

Yet, sugar survived, and with it the plantation system. The freed blacks did not do a Great Trek. They remained, except for a few stragglers, marooned on the coast, their lives embittered by sugar, their fortunes controlled by planters and their attempts at an economy, not dependant on the plantations, floundering in the mid.

Understandably, therefore, the Post-~~Emancipation~~ history of Guyana necessarily raises a number of fascinating issues; which demand and deserve careful, meticulous analysis. This the author has attempted to give and has largely succeeded in his attempt.

He takes his stand on the grand thesis that the "continued production of sugar without slaves had nothing to do with the operation of blind economic forces. On the contrary, the survival of sugar was the result of several deliberate acts of policy." (p 32)

Among these acts of policy were: the conscious inhibition of the negro village economy as an alternative to the plantation; the restoration of coercive labour, in the form of indenture, to the planters; and the pre-emption of public funds by the plantocracy to bolster their industry and preserve their class.

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The main ~~extra~~ corollary of this central contention is that the plantocracy could do all these things because it possessed political power; the planters controlled the colonial legislature and the financing body. Before this power, the Colonial Office was, despite its constant protestations to the contrary, impotent. This part of the Imperial circumference always got the better of the bargain against the Imperial centre.

As Adamson puts it, referring to the conflict in the 1840's between the liberal humanitarianism of the Colonial Office and the illiberal particularism of the local oligarchy, "But by 1850 resistance to plantation pressure in the Colonial Office was crumbling. Henry Taylor had seen the alternatives which faced the makers of Colonial policy as early as 1838. At that time, during the strike of the Jamaica Assembly, he had wanted to abolish all West Indian Legislatures and concentrate authority wholly in Imperial hands."

Otherwise the planter's oligarchic position in local politics and his control over public finance would mean that his interest would be bound to prevail against all others, peasant and indentured immigrant alike. Barring complete control from London, the Colonial Office would have no alternative but co-operation with the estate owners" (p.52).

Again and again he refers to the Colonial Office impotently permitting

^{In} a policy to which they had formed a principled objection. ^{his con-}
^{however} ^{more} clusion states the matter in more complex and certainly/subtle form.

^{it} There he implies that ~~he~~ was not so much the collapse of liberal principles of which the Colonial Office was culpable, but its preference all along ~~were~~ for the interest of sugar over the interest of Negroes and East Indians. (p.56)

In fact Adamson seems to be oscillating between two poles and settling firmly on neither. What it would have been more to the point to say was that the Colonial Office in the 20 years after emancipation had an ambivalent attitude to the plantocracy on the one hand and to the peoples of the colony on the other. The ambivalence was most marked in the 1840's; by the end of the 1850's it had resolved itself into the simple axiom that in any conflict of interest in British Guiana the primacy of the plantations must be preserved. It is crucial to the understanding of the period that the shift from ambivalence to priority be properly analysed. For it explains both the "Revolution" of Emancipation and the "Counter Revolution" which followed it.

Adamson in his introduction says that "Emancipation alone is by any standard a social and juridical ~~Revolution~~ of the first order " (p.10). This is true if the long historical view of it is taken.

But for the purposes of our argument, it would be safer to say that Emancipation was a Revolution of limited liability. And written into the heart of this supposedly great change was the ambivalence which was ultimately to simplify itself into an unqualified support for the plantocracy. If Emancipation robbed the planters of their property in slaves, it was not intended to rob them of their position in society. The nature of social obligations was changed by the freeing of the bondsmen, but no fundamental changes were envisaged in the social structure. Parliament did not abolish slavery in order to preside over the liquidation of the plantation system. It abolished slavery in order to produce a change from forced labour to free labour. But the freedom of labour was not an absolute concept. If to a few of the Abolitionists it meant the right of the blacks to work for themselves, to most of the men who voted for Emancipation it meant the right of the labourers to choose between one employer and another - not to choose to have no employers at all. ~~As Donald Wood has so succinctly expressed it~~ ⁽¹⁾ To the Victorians those who worked for themselves were the idle poor; those who worked for their betters were the industrious poor⁽²⁾. It was with this in mind that Viscount Howick (later Lord Grey; Colonial Secretary from 1846 - 1851) proposed in 1833 that all lands not producing for export should be taxed. He ^(P34) wanted to discourage the drift of the ex-slaves from the plantations to the provision grounds. Only the very industrious blacks would be able to support themselves on their own lands and these would in any

society find a way to independence and become the nucleus of a yeomen class. Lord Howick's plan was not adopted; but it was with precisely the same intention that Lord Glenelg in 1836 laid down a policy for land-~~locking~~ the ~~Negroes~~: Crown land could only be sold in minimum parcels of 100 acres at the upset price of £1 per acre. (P 36)

To many Victorians, with the exception of the Exeter Hall Humanitarians, the plantation system represented an economic necessity, a moral instructor, and the basis for the continued civilisation of the colony as well as the continuing process of civilising the blacks. They may not, as Adamson states in his conclusion, have had ^{any} particular affection for the planters. From Henry Taylor and Herman Merivale to Sydney Olivier, Colonial Office ^{minutes} ~~Minutes~~ display an ill-concealed contempt for the 'Saccrine Oligarchs' " (p.256). But this contempt was merely one side of the coin, and it was borne more of the querelousness of the plantocracy than of any genuine disapproval of the institution which sustained them. The Colonial Office men may not have had a particularly high opinion of the planters but they had a very high opinion of the plantation.

Economically, it was, in their reckoning, ^{imperative} ~~important~~ to preserve the plantation system. Guyana, like other West Indian colonies, was committed to a crop demanding the extensive supply of capital. Throughout the 19th century there seemed to successive ^{Colonial} ~~Secretaries~~ no alternative to this crop. ⁽³⁾ They were basically concerned with the continuance of the extant rather than with the initiation of the improbable. Without sugar they thought, Guyana would become an economic ~~derelict~~ derelict, exporting nothing and importing nothing,

inhabited only by peasants who could produce the barest necessities for their own consumption. In short, instead of being a "Trans-atlantic Eden" it would merely be a Trans-Atlantic Africa. The white presence was the condition of the flow of British capital, and the whites in their turn would only remain if the economic structure made their presence possible and their interest dominant. The test of a good colony was whether it attracted capital, and in Guyana, in order to attract capital, no easy ~~was~~ task after Emancipation, it was necessary to preserve the vitality of the plantation system and its single product sugar.

If the plantation system was a guarantee of the inflow of capital, it was also the chief security of civilisation in the colony. Adamson argues that Westminster having destroyed slavery in the name of humanity and Free Trade seemed indifferent to the reconstruction of some of the worst aspects of the pre-Emancipation agrarian system. ^(p 33) He has missed the essential points here. Having destroyed slavery, Westminster was concerned that the blacks should be free indeed, but disciplined. Fearing, as they did, that a people who had only recently been slaves, would not readily develop "correct" notions of freedom, they saw the plantation as a salutary school for inculcating the proper relationship between labour and liberty. ⁽⁴⁾ After all in their scheme of things the ~~the~~ English factory labour was free but disciplined - disciplined by the asperities of a severe climate and by the abundance of population. Without the discipline of the

~~Negroes~~ The Proper Virtues

plantation system the ~~negro~~ character would never develop; their progress as a race would be fitful and slow; and Emancipation would come to mean that a race had been freed, but its character had not been reformed. (To misquote the famous statement of Lord Harris). Adamson quotes Lord John Russell to good effect "The labourers, if they shall be induced to prefer the mere means of life to the wages and earnings of a comfortable subsistence, will yearly decline in civilisation, become an ignorant degraded class in society, and lose all the advantages which may be secured by a moderate degree of industry and exertion" (p.40 - 41).

There was a further refinement to this position - a refinement which underscores the messianic self-righteousness of the Victorians. Emancipation was the end of bondage but the beginning of pupilage. The ~~Negro~~ was made free in order to be made civilised. Civilisation implied two things: regular sustained toil on the one hand which the plantation would enforce, and the presence of white people in the society on the other, equipped with sufficient influence and prestige to act as models ^{on} of which the ~~Negro~~ would pattern himself. In other words the ~~Negro~~ needed the class which once held him in slavery to teach how to be properly free. Lord ^{Grey} ~~Gray~~ was a powerful exponent of this principle. In 1846 he wrote "the progress of civilisation among the negroes is entirely dependent upon their continuing ^{to} have the advantage of European superintendence and example, of which they must be deprived if sugar cultivation in the West Indies is abandoned. The

true interest of all classes of the inhabitants of Guyana is therefore the same. (C.O. ¹¹¹264 The reply of Grey to Barkly's Despatch, 1 June, ~~1849~~). In short the civilisation of the ~~negro~~^{black man} made British Institutions necessary; the survival of the plantation made British Institutions possible.

But if the Colonial Office was concerned to secure the preservation of the plantocracy, theyⁿ were equally concerned in the 1840's at least to restrain it from intemperate political behaviour. Here their ambivalence became a dilemma; they did not want the planters to use their political power to tyrannise the blacks and so negate their freedom; but ~~they~~^{they} did not want the blacks to use their freedom to starve the plantations of labour and so negate the plantation system. ~~In fact they did not want a class struggle.~~^{At all costs they wanted to avoid a class struggle.} What they ~~wanted~~^{desired} was a compromise - conceived by the Colonial Office and brought forth by the Governor on the spot. This explains why Henry Taylor, ~~as~~ as Adamson has quite rightly pointed out "wanted to abolish all West Indian Legislatures and concentrate authority wholly in Imperial hands" (p.52). This would ensure that the regulating mechanism was free from local vested interests; and imbued with the spirit of imperial ^{im}partiality, and in place of continual clashes ^{between black and white} there would evolve an atmosphere of accommodation.

It was in the late 1840's that the ~~(ambivalence of the)~~
^{attempt of the} Colonial Office (~~the attempt~~) to preserve these two principles at the same time ~~n~~ began to resolve itself into making the plantation the top

priority and the freedom of labour a miserable second. Adamson maintains that the change of attitude "remains a notable insistence of ~~effect~~ the easy collapse of liberal ideas before the pressure of special interest" (p.51). It is not so much a collapse of a stand as the ending of an ambivalence. The Sugar Duties Act of 1846 and the Financial Panic of 1847 appeared to knock the bottom out of the sugar industry in Guyana and of course in the West Indies. Those planters who were still struggling for survival claimed that unless the freedom of the workers was temporarily frozen the plantation system would ^{perish} permanently. At last the Colonial Office had to choose between the two principles and since the plantation was both an economic institution and a moral value, it became the prime principle of Guyanese life to which the other principle, given validity by Emancipation, had to genuflect. It is not so much that the political power and pressures of the planters of Guyana turned the reluctance of the Colonial Office into approval or forced it impotently to abandon its principles, as the Colonial Office fearing the collapse of what they regarded as an absolute essential through the ^{operation} ~~operation~~ of what they regarded as a qualified necessity chose the former as against the latter, thus preserving the primacy of sugar and ^{partially} abandoning the principle of free labour.

This is borne out if reference is made to Trinidad. If Adamson's contention about the retreat of the Colonial Office before the power of the planters is correct then what was true for Guyana

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should have been untrue for Trinidad. Trinidad from its accession to the British Empire had been a Crown Colony. There was no planter ^{led} control, legislature to ~~stop~~ ^{stimy} the Governor, impede his administration by constant counter-manceuvering, or bring it to a dead ~~halt~~ halt by ~~precipitating~~ ^{precipitating} a constitutional deadlock, as happened in Guyana in 1840. ^{1835, and 1848.} All of Henry Taylor's wishes for West Indian Governments were fulfilled in Trinidad. Yet Trinidad mounted a system of indentured labour almost identical with that of Guyana. East Indian immigration lasted in both colonies until 1917, and the sanctions of the system were ^{almost} as severe in a colony where the Governor had uncontrolled power as it was in Guyana where he did not. (6) If Adamson's thesis is correct Trinidad ought to have been a far cry from Guyana. The fact that it was not confirms the view that the actual political power of the planters in either colony had less to do with the policies of the Colonial Office than the outlook of the Colonial Office itself. Recalcitrant political behaviour in Guyana ^{the appeal of} re-enforced considerations already respected - it did not force the acceptance of considerations hitherto rejected.

The substance of free labour was destroyed by indenture. But it was necessary that the semblance be preserved. This was done by calling it contract, for the Victorians had the knack of smoothing unpleasant realities with seemly euphemisms. To the planters in Guyana, whose moral postulates were usually produced only for export,

indenture was a way of procuring predictable labour: the planters had it when and where he wanted it. This was ~~after all~~ one of the great justifications of slavery and it remained the ^{Fundamental} ~~remained~~ justification of indenture. But even when the high minded men at the Colonial Office had resolved their ambivalence, they preferred at first at least to maintain ^{an apparent} ~~their~~ balance with semantic props. The word contract was used like a talisman to cover the contradiction between the principle of free labour and the practice of immobilised labour under indenture. For if the essence of freedom is mobility then indenture was its opposite. But to state the contradiction was to condemn Emancipation. Worst, it was to admit that the Colonial Office was taking people from India where they were free to Guyana where they would be bound: a state of affairs not to be permitted, let alone admitted, in an era of increasing free trade and freer institutions.

P Lord Grey, as Adamson points ^{out} ~~was~~ a convinced Free Trader. He was capable of writing "all experience tends to prove that no legal restrictions, however severe, if they stop short of the extreme compulsion which is characteristic of slavery, can succeed in enforcing really efficient labour from men who have no interest in being efficient" (pp 50-51). But when it came to the crunch he permitted indenture on the ground of contract: "The immigrants by accepting a free passage had contracted an obligation to labour on the estate, since it was for the planters that they had been brought in" (p.51). Significantly, indentured labour was often referred to

as "free labour" or "labour under contract" and it is not difficult
(7)
to see why.

The British Government having in 1834 freed the slaves and therefore taken from sugar growers a substantial part of their property, in 1846 moved to free trade and so took from their sugar growers their protection. The removal of the one was justified on grounds of morality: the removal of the other on grounds of efficiency. The loss of protection would it was argued force the West Indian Sugar industry to become more "modern" ^{ensuring} ~~showing~~ the replacement of primitive technology with up to date machines and encouraging the art of more economical management. But the shadow of Cuba lay heavily over these assumptions. The Cuban planter had the advantage of both technology and slavery. This was crucial. It was necessary therefore to prove that free labour plus technology in British Guiana ~~could~~ compete successfully with slave labour plus technology in Cuba. Consequently indenture simply had to be synonymous with freedom: a most suitable sort of freedom too since it ^{relieved} ~~would leave~~ the employee of having to fend for his labour and it ~~xx~~ relieved the labourer of having to fend for himself. ~~[This is why throughout the century the planters and the Colonial Office - except when staggering abuses were disclosed and~~ ^{MIT} ~~a Royal Commission appointed - stressed the paternalism of the system.]~~ In return for protection against a malevolent environment, protection symbolised by the hospital, the free lodgings and medical

attention, and provided by the planter, the immigrant protected the planter from the caprice of uncontracted labour. Here was the mutuality of contract indeed: the planter ensured to the coolie his survival and ^{of his person} ~~and~~ the coolie ensured to the planter the survival of his estate. All this explains why the planters and the Colonial Office stressed the paternalism of the system as well as the economics of it. It was excellent propaganda for "sacchine oligarchs" on the coast of South America to be able to state that they took more care of the needs of their workers than the well respected employers of the mother country. It was an excellent sop to the consciences of the Colonial Office men for it proved after all that morality and ~~economics~~ economics were two sides of the same coin: a conclusion devoutly Victorian.

Adamson underestimates the significance of these considerations and so makes the policy of the Colonial Office seem much more a mystery than it need be. But he trenchantly demonstrates that to the planters the economics of indenture were more important than the morality thereof. He quotes Sir Henry Barkly, the Governor of British Guiana between 1849 and 1853 who had the additional advantage of being a planter himself "a planter has a capital of so many pounds invested in his estate, which, provided he could keep his machinery going so many days in the year, would yield him a fair return, but he cannot make sugar this week because half of the labourers choose to go fishing - and he cannot attend to such a cane piece until the weeds have choked the cane sprouts, because they are taking advantage of the weather to plant their own yams."

Immigration is the readiest palliative for this evil, but immigration without contracts would require to be almost infinite in extent to produce any permanent effect on the supply of labour in British Guiana" (p.50).

The subsequent severity of indenture which the author carefully documents certainly proves that ~~the~~ his emphasis is right. For while the planters in 1847 and 1848 justified their advocacy of indenture by saying that they could not be expected to look after ~~sick~~ ^{SICK} ~~six~~ ~~xx~~ coolies who on recovery would abandon their services, they were less concerned about the health of the coolies than the control of their movements. However, in pressing his argument Adamson had overlooked a telling consideration. In 1847 Governor Light, appalled by the statistics of sickness and mortality among the coolies tried to persuade the Combined Court to provide for district government hospitals out of ^{general} ~~the-generals~~ revenues. This would have saved many of the plantations the expense of erecting private hospitals especially at a time when credit was short and the general cry was "Ruin". That the planters preferred being bound to established ~~x~~ estate hospitals at their own expense rather than being free to establish hospitals at the public expense shows how highly they desired the ~~Immobilisation Act~~ of the immigrants on their individual estates, and how much they wanted to recreate the closed world of the plantation which Emancipation had prised open. (8)

Since it was the economics of the affair which really mattered to the planters, Adamson has no difficulty in proving how severely the system of Indenture weighed on the Indians. This, he maintains, was true not only before the Royal Commission of 1870 but even after it. There is a temptation to regard the system after 1870 as more humane and less demanding because the Royal Commission had shaken the planters belief in imperial non-interference and it made the Magistrates bolder in the equitable administration of the law. What the author establishes is that the plantocracy played their old game of cunningly waiting for the fit of imperial reforming ardour to cool and adroitly pushing the law back in the old direction. Equally significant, he shows the continuity disparity between the demands of the law and the demands of the employers: indentured workers in 1877 for instance were fined for refusing to work from 3 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. in the factory ~~ix~~ when the prescribed limit was 13 hours. As he concludes "it was all too easy to evade the intent of the law. The Attorney General himself admitted that the Government was 'quite in the dark' as to the way justice was administered outside Georgetown and New Amsterdam" (p.145).

But this was not all. On many of the estates the practical expressions of paternalism were clearly in a statement of under-
nourishment in the 1880's. Adamson is right when he says that ^{it} he was

only when the smooth surface of collusion between the planters and the Governor was broken that one glimpses the stark realities ~~xxx~~ beneath the staid complacencies of the later official reports. This happened for instance in 1886 when the Medical Officer to the Immigration Department produced an indictment of estate conditions, in which the hospitals, the housing, the ~~f~~ecal disposal, and the facilities for storing drinking water were all shown to fall short of either the requirements of the law or even of humanity. The Governor supported the report as a judgement on the Immigration Department; the planters condemned it as a dishonest assault on their integrity. The result was a constitutional deadlock of such magnitude that Sir Henry Irving announced his decision to reform the Constitution, so that the plantocracy could no longer strengthen their defiance of the law by a constitutional stoppage of the Administration.

But Sir Henry Irving was an ^{exception} ~~except~~ to the general run of Governors since the late 1840's. Those who governed Guyana before 1870 saw it as their duty to promote the prosperity of sugar. Those who governed after 1870 saw it as their duty to protect its precarious existence, battered as it was by competition from beet sugar. The former considered the ^{defects} ~~effects~~ of the ^{Indenture} ~~system~~ as a small price to pay for the buoyancy of the economy. The latter considered the proper enforcement

of the law as too high a cost to extract from an industry struggling for survival. They justified their laxity in the first case in the first case and their leniency in the second by the one axiom: "Sugar is the Colony". Adamson establishes all of this with commendable thoroughness but the evidence he presents immediately raises some fundamental questions-ones which are hotly debated by historians of the plantation system. Given the asperities of life on the sugar estates, why was there not more ^{Violence} ~~violence~~ and concerted protest directed against the system? And in the case of Guyana, why did so many free coolies remain voluntarily on estates where they endured a villainous exploitation?

Before 1873, when the process of reindenturing Indians for a second or third five-year term ceased, the number of indentured workers on the plantations always exceeded the free ones living there. But whereas in 1872 there were 38,318 indentured as against 12,003 unindentured; in 1894 - 1896 there were 20,566 indentured as against 35,341 unindentured and between 1903 and 1904 the indentured fell to 15,025 and the free East Indians rose to 39,456. ^{(P106) under} ~~Given~~ the conditions of estate life which the author has so meticulously demonstrated, there should have been a massive exodus of Indians from estates to villages, to abandoned plantations, for up the rivers after 1872. The fact that this did not take place calls for careful investigation. ^P Equally demanding consideration is the fact that

though strikes did take place against the system of indenture, their incidence is surprisingly limited and their compass surprisingly small. The peak periods of protests in the form of strikes or riots were 1869 to 1870; 1886 - 1888 and 1894 - 1895. In the first case the disturbances began about a year before the arrival of the Royal Commission but increased when the Commissioners were taking their evidence. The Indians seemed to gain confidence from the presence of the Commission using it as a protective mechanism to express their exasperations without incurring the severest penalties. The latter two periods were times of severe depression for the sugar industry; wages were falling to an all time low and tasks were being correspondingly increased. But the figures that Adamson has put together do not suggest anything like an extensive range of protest. ^(P 153) That strikes did take place in these circumstances is certainly not to be wondered at. That there were however not more violent ~~violence~~ and widespread manifestations of anger certainly demands explanation. Indeed the explanation ^a of these paradoxes ⁴⁶ - paradoxes they are - have wider implications ^{than} in Guyana and should be of interest of all ^{the} those concerned with the nature of plantation system in the New World.

P Adamson offers four basic factors by way of explanation: the use of an armed Police Force; the isolation of the estate population; the absence or removal of effective leadership; and the internal divisions of the ~~estate~~ labour force. (P 154 - 159)

could

The use of an armed Police who ~~can~~ be expected to fire on the strikers, though a powerful dissuasive from protest would not have been a total ~~ster~~ deterrent if the labourers had developed their own counter offensive organisation. The question therefore really revolves around the failure to create organisations for protest across plantation barriers, especially as the number of free coolies whose movement was not restricted by the pass laws began to increase. Adamson therefore settles for the theory of ineffective leadership on the one hand and the divisions of the labour force on the other. He contends that "many of the individuals who emerged as leaders at first ^(p136) appeared to have done so/on the basis their high caste". This meant that, since organising ability was not the test of leadership, little in the way of coordinate action could emerge. He admits that the evidence here is flimsy and therefore this is at best a tentative conclusion. Other, equally flimsy evidence, suggests that in some of the riots, e.g. the Leonora Riot of 1867 and the Devonshire Castle Riot of 1872 (not 1873) as he says) the rioters were ^rtained and disciplined by old sepoys from the Indian Army who apparently came to Guyana to avoid the retaliation visited on those who found themselves on the wrong side of the Indian mutiny. ~~(=)~~ Certainly, in the Leonora Riot, the Indians appeared to have been well drilled, and not ^{only} out-manoeuvred the Police but actually routed them. ^{(9) P} It is pushing it too

2 far to conclude from the reluctance ~~in~~ of the planters to take high caste Indians that they ^{saw} ~~saw~~ them as centres of revolt. It is safer to argue that since what the planters needed ^{was} good labourers, ~~but~~ not priestly loafers, especially with their industry in jeopardy, the resolution of the Planters Association in 1890 against the importation of high caste coolies sprang from the economics rather than the politics of the thing.

The author is on much safer ground when he notes the techniques adopted by the Administration for removing potential agitators from estates ^{those} where their power of leadership was being demonstrated to ^{those} ~~places~~ where they were not known. This was a favourite device of the ruling classes throughout the period and as little was ever kept secret on a plantation the emerging leaders were always easily spotted. ^{But} ~~his~~ most convincing explanation/ lies in the divisions inherent in the labour force. The Creoles throughout the period either kept aloof from Indian acts of protest, or joined the estate authorities against them; and planters openly stated their comfort in having both Indians and negroes working on the same estate. But the divisions between the free coolies and the indentured ones were also a crucial factor. For the available evidence suggests that the unindentured never made common cause with the indentured in creating disturbances.

Here Adamson has touched on two aspects of the problem that deserve fuller and more analysis. The first is the importance of the drivers in the system of estate control; and second is the importance

of compensatory mechanisms mounted by the estates to offset the results of their own severity.

As late as the end of the 1870's many estates still employed whose black drivers for Indian gangs. These men, whose--is contemporary accounts are to be believed, had little sympathy with their subordinates, were powerful instruments of control. They kept a sharp eye on the behaviour of the Indians, they picked up any evidence of planned insubordination, and since they had a racial contempt ~~as~~ for the coolies as a people and a social contempt for the coolies as bound labourers, they never developed the psychology of the privileged slaves who ^{often} passed from being collaborators with their ⁽¹⁰⁾ masters into being leading revolutionaries against them. But this was true even where the drivers were Indians and not blacks. The Royal Commission of 1870 noted that on some estates the drivers of a gang of North Indians were generally Madrasses and vice versa, so as to ensure that bonds of sympathy did not develop between leaders and gangs. When riots broke out, not infrequently the attack was directed first at the driver which gave the estate authorities enough ⁽¹¹⁾ time to plan their measures of defence and suppression.

But perhaps the most important explanation lies in the compensatory mechanisms which estates offered to their inhabitants [?] ~~indentured~~ or indentured. Early in the experience of indenture the planter ⁽¹²⁾ discovered that "the best way to control a coolie is through his cow" and the more perceptive of the plantocracy made full use of

this knowledge. Because Indians were immigrants, they were desirous of saving money; because many of them lived between two minds - the desire to return to India and the desire to settle in Guyana, they also

wanted to make money. Cows and pasturage were important means of ~~doing~~ ^{things} ~~but~~ ^{saving} - and the shrewder planters made the cow the coolies' hostage

to ~~fortune or at least to~~ the estate. The Royal Commissioners pointed

out that many coolies reindentured either to enable them to buy a cow

or because managers made reindenture the condition on which hung

continued pasturage for their cows. And as William Russell demonstrated

after the Leonora riots, planters were capable of withdrawing the con-

cession for pasturing cows on the estate from those immigrants who

joined the riot. In 1890 the indentured had an estimated 6,155 cattle

and other livestock on the estates and the unindentured an estimated

20,000. This certainly produced a strong class of collaborators who

squared the fall in wages with these concessions and acquiesced

in the former because of the latter. The alternatives were renting

pasture lands ^{not immune to floods} on the Corentyne Coast or on the West Coast of Berbice

^{while} ~~when~~ pasture land on most estates was free. As wages fell in the mid-

1890's the planters used the compensatory mechanisms to the full. The

free coolies frequently could get not enough work to fill a week.

But they were given extra parcels of land on the estate to cultivate

provisions and - more to their taste - to begin growing rice. They thus

got from the land what they could not get from their wages and therefore

Although the mortality rates on the estates
seem to have been fairly high,

neither an exodus nor an explosion took place. Furthermore to the free coolie the choice really lay between giving up a free house, free medicine and a ^{spell in} ~~sparely~~ ⁽²⁾ and admittedly defective hospital for a rented house, purchase medicine and no hospital at all in either a negro village or an Indian settlement. ~~Considering the high mortality ratio on the estates,~~ the mortality rates in the village were appalling higher. Hence many Indians preferred to bear the exploitations of the estate coupled with the certainty of some medical attention to the freedom of the settlement coupled with the certainty of no medicine at all. And as Adamson has ^{demonstrated} ~~clearly pointed out~~ the villages were largely devoid of medical notice from most of the century and especially after 1873. (P 87)

Free coolies therefore had a clear choice, either ["] the fringe benefits ["] and continued submission to the estate authorities or freedom without them. Many chose the freedom and infiltrated into black villages in the 1870's, 80's and 90's or formed settlements of their own. (P 94) But there were many others who preferred to save money out of the concessions the estates made to them and work for the meagre wages the estates paid them. These were consequently rarely ready for protest in any form and they acted as a barrier to the cohesion of the labour force and therefore to widespread, coordinated forms of protest. If anyone should have been capable of coherent militancy it was precisely these free Indians who knew the ropes because of their long residence in the colony. In fact their potential is clearly evident, as Adamson points out, in those coolies who took their passages back to India and then returned to

INSERT in page 24.

P If the story of 19th Century Guyana is the survival of the plantation system with profit, it is also the story of the survival of the Black villages without it. Adamson considers the plight of the latter in relation to the power of the former. His basic proposition is simple: the plantocracy was hostile to the existence of the villages, whose success would have seduced large numbers of immigrants to abandon the estates. The economic failure of the villages therefore was a pre-condition of having a large pool of plantation labour.

Guyana to be reindentured. These men were particularly dangerous to the estates as they knew too well for the planters' convenience the intricacies of the Immigration Law. ^{Not surprising/7} ~~Naturally~~ the Government decided in 1904 to disallow their ^{re- (p156)} indenture. ^{the} The fact therefore that free Coolies, knowing most protested least, is a strong indication that ~~the~~ special concessions granted by the estates balanced off their specific grievances. A mixed labour force, part free part bound, proved in the end more grist for the planters' mill.

3rd tape.

INSERT PASSAGE beginning with "Ij" and ending with "labour"

This thesis has substantial merit but it needs to be carefully balanced by a collorary: the villagers could not have created a profitable melieu for themselves unaided since they had to tackle all the monumental problems of drainage which the ecology of coastal Guyana poses. All the evidence that the author amasses indicates that in their struggle with the terrain the sugar estates were aided by two powerful agencies: the technology made possible by a network of credit or capital; and the increasing labour force made possible by tapping the Colonial revenue. Capital was non-existent in the villages, for the negroes had exhausted their resources in the act of purchase, and the land was sold to them at cruelly inflated prices. And as long as the planters held power in the local constitution direct aid was withheld, except in the form of loans at

a
six percent interest or when ~~the~~ Governor like Sir Henry Irving, for a brief period, extracted from the oligarchs small grants-in-aid.

This is crucial for if village lands had been drained with the assistance of Government, then the problems inherent in the communalistic control of village would have been reduced to manageable proportions and probably have given the villagers time to devise techniques of co-operative management. Any attempt to discipline the coastal lands of Guyana demands a strong nerve centre. This central controlling body must keep in constant and coordinated ~~and~~ activity forces whose job it is to repair the sea defences and to shift them as the alternating cycles of erosion and accretion take place, as well as to keep unclogged the internal drainage system of land so precisely empoldered. The sugar estates in the 19th century possessed their nerve centre in the manager whose powers of control were autocratic and whose strategies were therefore single minded. But the communal black villages lacked precisely this. Having bought the villages as shareholders, the negroes attempted to mount co-operative Governments to act as substitutes for the autocratic managers. But co-operative management is an art not easily acquired and is usually the product of considerable evolution. Nor did the villagers acquire any experience of it during slavery. Black initiative in slavery in Guyana was expressed on the provisions grounds: it was individualistic. Collective activity was enforced labour. There was little tradition and therefore few techniques of communal organisation. The blacks had lost

the world of tribal sanctions capable of directing individual energy to communal ends and they had not yet found the world of organised self-government born either of trade unionism or industrial protest.

Their failure to create a strong nerve centre would not have matter much in another sort of terrain. In Guyana it was vital. For once their drainage became defective and their villages became swamped, economic initiative was blunted, even among the most vigorously industrious, and apathy set in.

Adamson pushes his point too far when he says in a note "it may be objected that the village economy would have declined in any case under the weight of its own disabilities. This may be so, but we will never know since the peasant economy was never allowed to find its natural part of development, whatever that might have been". (P33 Note)
It would, I suspect, be more in keeping with his evidence to suggest that governmental aid was necessary to the villages in the first ~~thirty~~ ^{Forty} years or so of their existence, to free them from a problem too big for their resources and so ensure the development of the co-operative ethics/ with which they bravely began what was intended to be an economic structure independent of the plantation. But he is on firm ground when he goes on to show that for the rest of the 19th century attempts by Governors to "improve the villages" were often too little and too late - usually exacerbating the problems rather than alleviating them, by invoking administrative palliatives instead of applying economic solutions.

Inevitably, one undercurrent in the development of this work is the question of race. It is not a question with which the author explicitly deals in most of his material. He calls upon it incidentally in his support of his main intention, giving us a tantalising glimpse of the problem which had become the most important social and political issue in contemporary Guyana. But in his conclusion, using the past to explain the present, he states "in terms of their respective relation to the plantation economy, the creole villager and the East Indian estate worker had much in common. The tax system fleeced both in the same inequitable way; land policy made it equally difficult for either to escape the shadow of the sugar cane; and they both suffered from the racial and class prejudice of the magistrates. In the broadest sense monoculture and oligarchy made the development of either group impossible. But the ^{rare} ~~rare~~ tragedy of post emancipation Guyanese history is that this common experience ^{was not} ~~(could not be?)~~ ~~was not~~ felt or perceived. Instead it was the divisive aspects of life—ethnic, cultural, and economic—that captured the consciousness of all important groups in the colony. It has been observed that one of the effects of large scale immigration is to weaken the "ideological force and cohesion of the working class". This is certainly the case in 19th century Guyana!.

Clearly then race, by Adamson's own admission, is important to the understanding of post emancipation 19th century British Guiana as ~~it is~~ ^{is} ~~a~~ fundamental ~~(?)~~ to the understanding of Guyana in the 20th century.

Indeed From the planters point of view they were two objectives after 1838:

to increase the labour force ^{but} ~~would~~ weaken its cohesion; and to practice a primitive form of social engineering which would prevent the too speedy rise of classes capable of challenging their power (16) by encouraging other groups to checkmate them. Both these objectives demanded racial policies, or at least policies which exploited cultural divisions and the small planter - merchant oligarchy in the 19th century lived by and rejoiced in divisions of the society beneath them.

As Adamson has shown the planters' basic response to Emancipation was the demand for immigrants. But their taste in immigration was catholic. Much as they often asserted that the African was the best of all workers in the cane piece they nonetheless sought Maderians, Maltese, Germans, even Irishmen and Scotsmen. Part of the reason was the uncertainty of the supply of Africans and West Indians. But part of it was also a desire to ~~widen~~ whiten the population, to lessen the isolation of the oligarch in a society where some of the emancipated blacks and the mulattoes were bound to make a thrust for upward social mobility. (17) This is what ^{was} ~~by is~~ meant by having a middle class - white in colour - who would act as a buffer between the "ambitious" blacks and "pretentious" coloureds but who would not themselves have ambitions above their station. In ~~fact~~ short their function was to keep the ^{"lower"} ~~low~~ orders down without pushing themselves up. P By the mid 1840's the Portuguese were seen as fulfilling both objectives. Their arrival in large numbers gave to the plantations, at least temporarily, some of the labour they needed, as well as contributed to the increasing

disunity of the plantation labourers. The author himself points out that in 1841 the blacks could produce a general strike in Demerara and Essequibo which paralysed the plantations and drove the planters to give in and withdraw the stringent ^{regulations} they had clapped on the workers. In 1848 when the second general strike occurred it was the blacks who had to give in to a 25% ~~per~~ reduction in wages: the strike was defeated by the Portuguese and East Indians who continued to work. (PP 165-166, 157)

By the end of the mid 1850's the Portuguese had admirably - from the oligarchy's point of view - fulfilled the second objective as well; they had become the monopoly wholesalers and retail shopkeepers of the colony. They ^{prevented} ~~presented~~ therefore the emergence from among the coloureds and blacks of a commercial bourgeoisie and thus kept even the limited suffrage out of the hands of all but a very few blacks and mulattoes.

Their success This was partially due to their previous experience of commerce in Madeira but it was also due to the deliberate patronage of merchants and planters. For there existed before Emancipation and shortly after it a group of hucksters accustomed to distributing goods throughout the colony and a number of shops had been set up by mulattoes and blacks in the early 1840's. By 1842 however the process of selective patronage to the Portuguese had begun. Governor Light reported in that year that a number of Georgetown merchants had entered into partnerships with Portuguese whose shops were noticable in various parts of Georgetown. (18) Portuguese hucksters would, in their refuge from the estates, take wholesale

INSERT P 30. after words
When he wrote

" By the coalition that had been entered into between the Portuguese and those whom we have mentioned (the Merchants), these foreigners, whose savings had not then amounted to enough to raise them from a condition of the most abject misery, were entrusted, in the first instance with goods on the easiest terms of credit to carry about the country while their native rivals were favoured with no credit at all, or a very stringent one " (19)

at higher prices than blacks and coloureds and make merely marginal profits on the sale by covering long distances, the fatigue of which often helped to bring about their early death. Beside it was an open policy among the merchants ~~that~~ to beat the blacks out of huckstering or shopkeeping ^{and} ~~was to force them~~ back into the cane field.

In fact one of the ~~excess~~ ^{remaining} consolations to the planters when they found some of the immigrants ~~staying~~ in Georgetown was that their ^{greater} ~~greatest~~ sophistication in urban existence would force the creoles into the rural districts where the plantations waited to receive them. The editor of the Royal Gazette summed all this up in 1843 when he wrote

"

The swift passage of the Portuguese from estate labourers to wholesale and retail traders and then on to commercial monopolists brought comfort to the plantocracy and of course evoked resentment from the Negroes. ~~The former~~ ^{the Portuguese} having left the estates for which they were originally brought were ~~loaded~~ ^{loaded} by officials, planters and merchants as

—

the blacks
industrious and go-getting; ~~the latter~~ having left the estates to
establish villages were lambasted as indolent and shiftless. The
encomiums delivered on the ~~Portuguese~~ ^{Medeirans} by the white elite in the 1840's
and '50's ^{are} ~~is a~~ symptom^s of the security they felt in having a class
which was serving its own interest but also ^{promoting} ~~promoting~~ theirs. This
view was echoed by Sir Henry Light in 1846 ^{who} when pressing for wide-
spread Portuguese immigration ~~he~~ wrote to the Colonial Secretary
"... and considering the very mixed population of this country whose
inhabitants have among them the refuse of every West Indian island
of Surinam of Cayenne and ^{of} Europe - with pretensions every day growing
more aspiring - the presence and introduction of a very numerous,
industrious, sober, frugal, quiet race of white persons, who looked up
with confidence to the government of the country of their adoption,
cannot but be beneficial to the future welfare of the Province (G.O. 111/
234 1 July 1846). (20)

The reaction of the negroes was understandably resentful and
^{their} ~~this~~ resentment bore fruit in the Angel Gabriel Riots of 1856, in which
negroes throughout the colony attacked some 617 Portuguese shops and
destroyed property estimated at \$250,000. Adamson sees the motivation
of the riot as overwhelmingly economic with only minor racial undertones.
I think the economic and racial motives can be weighed almost equally.
It is true that the negroes attacked Portuguese property and not
Portuguese persons. But it equally true that the object of their assault

in a society still obsessed ^{was} with colour ~~were~~ the property of whites.
The sense of collusion between the grand blancs and the petit blancs
was strong in the negro mind. And the feeling that the Portuguese were
given unfair assistance because of their white skins, and that the
creoles were treated with neglect because of their black skins was
strongly expressed in "The Creole" ~~in~~ a newspaper which came into
existence after the riots to defend the character and interests of
coloured and black people. (21)

One of the fundamental reason for upheavals ^{any} in the society
is the changing relationships between social classes, one losing its
ground and the other gaining it. Certainly, this is one of the
strong factors of the period between 1840 and 1855. The Portuguese
had come as manual labours and ended up as commercial monopolists.
The blacks accustomed ⁽²²⁾ to regard the Portuguese in the early 1840's as
"Poor White Trash" had to bend to their economic dominance by the
beginning of the 1850's. ^{When} ~~In~~ such a traumatic change takes place and the
class ~~is~~ which is forging ahead is both alien in culture and different
in colour - and in 1856 this was compounded by the fact that their colour
was ^{the} preferred one, then the hostility directed against their property
is not simply economic in origin but social and racial as well.

~~Now~~ Adamson is ~~not~~ strictly correct when, trying to establish the
economic nature of the riots, he claims that "in many cases indentured

immigrants who had also suffered from commercial monopoly and high prices joined the riots" (p.71). In fact all the evidence I have found points the other way. While West Indians, Africans (except in two or three cases ⁽²³⁾ ~~Kroomen~~) and creoles attacked the Portuguese shops, the East Indians and Chinese held aloof except in some cases where they picked up loot abandoned by the rioters on the public roads. But more important on the islands of the Essequibo River and on the Essequibo Coast itself the Stipendary Magistrates and many of the estate managers, not trusting the loyalty of their black rural constabulary, turned to the East Indians as a counter force to the rioters and pitched battles took place between them: the Indians, managers, magistrates and a few loyal blacks defending the Portuguese shops and the creoles, West Indians and Africans immigrants attacking. Governor Wodehouse was quite accurate therefore when he wrote "one thing is certain, it is a strife of races" ⁽²⁴⁾ (C.O.111/309 ~~Wodehouse to Labouchere, 10 Mar 1856~~). And after the riots when he was tightening up the security measures of the colony he felt that the Essequibo area had no need for special protection. The presence of coolies there was protection enough against any further outbreaks by the blacks. ⁽²⁵⁾ (Royal Gazette 4 Mar 1856; 13 Mar 1856).

The 1856 riots demonstrated conclusively to the white elite the significance of race in Guyanese society. It took the form of an open hostility of blacks against Portuguese and aloofness mixed with

distrust which characterised the relations between East Indians and negroes.

By the 1860's the Portuguese had amply fulfilled the roles which the white oligarchy had cast for them: they were a middle class which kept the negroes at bay and the mulattoes at ~~xxx~~ great distance from political power. By the 1860's the East Indians had also fulfilled the role which the planters cast for them, they made impossible ^{any} ~~the~~ cohesion of the labour force and both by the indentures they lived under and by their cultural and racial aloofness ^{to} ~~of~~ ^{they} the negro made unity between the two sections of the working class unlikely. No form of labour organisation for protest or ~~protection~~ of workers therefore emerged and the planters were able to play one group off against the other.

The negro worker was generally anti-planter but not when the Indian was striking or revoking. Then he became a stout defender of "law and order" ⁽²⁶⁾ and assisted the planters to restore their control over the coolies. Adamson laments that the ~~Negro~~ ^{Indian} and the ~~coolie~~ could not perceive that they were both exploited by the plantocracy, but it was is not difficult to see why. The black man ~~xx~~ did not regard the coolie as the planter's victim but more often as his ally, or at least his instrument and therefore transferred to the Indian the resentment he had for the employer.

Increasingly as the century wore on the ~~coolie~~ ^{Indian} was as much ⁽²⁷⁾ accused of robbing the negro of his equitable wage as the planter. ~~East~~

The East Indian became a living symbol of the negro's frustration on the estate and so the cry was raised of the coolie taking bread out of the mouth of the creole. What is more the negro villager suffering from chronic flooding, lacking medical facilities and substantial assistance from Government, came to look on the services provided by the estate to the indentured and free coolies as a form of favouritism, ^{the} pampering the immigrant at the expense of the native. It seemed to the editors of successive ^{negro} newspapers that every resource of the colony was strained to ^{make} ~~main~~ the coolies comfortable but the blacks were neglected - ~~neglected~~ both by the government and by the queen. ^{Worse,} (29)

~~This~~ This conviction was reinforced by the propaganda of the day which dwelt (?) ad nauseam on the salvation of the colony wrought by the coolies and the near destruction of it by the negroes after Emancipation. Because as Adamsom so abundantly proves sugar was con- sidered/sine qua ~~non~~ ^{the economic} then the race which propped it (up despite the manipulation) ^{involved} was considered relevant to the country's prime purpose; and the race which did not was considered irrelevant. The negro was made to feel almost like a vulgar footnote to the main text of the colony's life.

Students of race relations are by now accustomed to the phenomenon of "~~displaced contempt~~" practised by one exploited group

transferred
Prejudice

against another. And the ~~N~~egro practised it in the 19th century. To preserve his self respect in a society which accorded him little spiritually and in an economy which afforded him little materially it was necessary to despise the groups below him so that the contrast in status would mean a compensation in psychology. Hence the "lowly coolie" became the object of the ~~N~~egroes' contempt. If he was bound ^{on account of} the ~~N~~egro felt suitably superior ~~by~~ his freedom - if he were free the ~~N~~egro felt suitably superior ^{on account of} ~~by~~ his more Anglo-Saxon norms. This explains in turn why despite the antipathy of the blacks to the planters the latter usually kept the coolie in order when he tried to rebel: they were asserting their superior sense of civilization ^{is} and decorum.

The coolie on ~~the~~ other hand, held up by the planters and officials as the saviour of the colony and then later as he took to extensive cattle rearing and rice growing, held up as an economic success - the only race ^{from} ~~of~~ which true yeomen would eventually come - looked down on the negro as an economic failure aping the white man's outward forms but incapable of making money like him. ^{When} ~~As Bronkhorst~~ ^{Creates} ~~reports~~ taunted the Indians for being cheap labour, the latter were heard to retort:

"yes, you rascal neegha man, me come from India dis 40 sikus year; s'posing me and me matty no come dis side fo' work, you rascal neeghaa man been a statue one time." (30)

When the two races at the end of the 19th century began to mix ^{in the villages} these attitudes did not die out: they became dormant. Competition between them was reduced to a minimum because the races had taken stock of each other and largely, but not obviously, supervised by the ruling elite had worked out areas of accommodation based on ~~racial~~ role distribution - certain occupations became roughly the preserve of certain races and were not generally disturbed by the others. ^{The} ~~This~~ acceptance of this situation usually gives ^{a multi-racial} ~~the~~ society peace and an apparent stability. ^{With} ~~with~~ the decline in competition for the same things came a decline in overt race feeling. ^P By the 1940's the Indians were no longer content with this division of roles. Economic change was making them wealthy and wealth was making them socially and professionally mobile. ^{And} ~~As~~ it came about that just at the time when the blacks and the browns were poised to take over the power being abandoned by the British the Indians joined in competition for it. All ^{and} the old attitudes/stereotypes which lay dormant came to the surface, and a competition so lurid began as to produce in the 1960's tragic race riots and in the 1970's a continuing political problem. Adamson does not quite explain how the racial situation of the late 19th century ^{at least after 1917} led to the racial explosions of the 1960's - for ^{the} society went ^{thru} ~~thru~~ decades of little racial animosity. More attention to the factor of race in the period he analysed would have given the book and ^{added} ~~extra~~ value.

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But although I have expressed disagreement with certain aspects of his thesis and have placed different emphases on others than he, this is in no way imply that I find the book inadequate. It is an outstanding piece of work carefully researched, impeccably written and cogently argued. My reservations are simply a measure of the stimulation which the book provides, ^{and I} ^{essential reading.} ~~and it is a must~~ for all those who want to understand Guyanese or West Indian history in the 19th century.

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